

State Dept. Bill with Provision to Make Goal a Foreign Policy Priority Passes During Committee Vote

Washington, DC - Congresswoman Betty McCollum's (MN-04) bipartisan bill to end child marriage, *The International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act of 2009* (H.R. 2103), has been included in the State Department reauthorization bill, which was approved during a Foreign Affairs Committee mark up vote today and now advances to the full U.S. House for consideration.

"This is the first time ending child marriage has been prioritized as a foreign policy goal," Congresswoman McCollum said. "I think every American would agree that the United States should be a global leader in the fight to end the practice of forcing girls as young as 8 years old to become wives."

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has expressed support for efforts to protect girls. In a letter earlier this year to Congresswoman McCollum she noted, "Child marriage is a clear and unacceptable violation of human rights, and that the Department of State denounces all cases of child marriage as child abuse."

Everyday, thousands of young girls in the developing world are forced into marriage with adult

men decades older. Globally, an estimated 60 million girls in the developing world under the age of 18 are married, a figure that is estimated to increase by another 100 million over the next decade if present trends continue. Congresswoman McCollum's measure labels child marriage as a human rights violation that undermines U.S. investments in foreign assistance to improve women's and girls' education, health, economic status.

"Child marriage condemns girls to a life of forced labor, coerced sex, extreme poverty and utter hopelessness - it is time for child marriage to end," Congresswoman McCollum added.

Congresswoman Betty McCollum (MN-4) serves on the House Appropriations & Budget Committees.

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